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ABSTRACT

Open admission s is an important change in the entry procedures to a major social institution. Several variations of open enrollment have been noted: (1) complete universal higher education based on individual desire; (2) universal entry on the basis of particular needs and talents; and (3) admission of a percentage of students under different selection criteria than those admitted under traditional criteria. Cornell University has chosen the third alternative. On the basis of studies conducted at Cornell, very little value should be placed on the standard academic predictors when selecting these minority group students. Non-intellective factors such as motivation, leadership ability, talent, are more useful predictors of college achievement. The specific details of Cornell's program and the Committee on Special Educational Projects are included in the appendix of this report. (Author/KJ)

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Introductory Remarks to Forum Discussion

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Challenges Presented by Open Enrollment

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Open admissions, or open enrollment, is a new expression of an old dream: higher education for all. It is an important topic for study because it involves a dramatic clash between an ideal--equal educational opportunity--and its fulfillment. Many people support the ideal until its realization challenges their conceptions of current standards.

Open admissions is an important change in the entry procedures to a major social institution. It symbolizes desired social gains for minority groups in the U.S.A. And it questions popular notions about admission and academic standards, advancement criteria, failure and success, and the traditional functions of the university. It challenges us to think about the future of higher education. Who should be educated? What is "higher" education?

Several variations of open enrollment have been ~~adopted~~ noted. One scheme calls for complete universal higher education based on individual desire. The proponents of this philosophy compare the university to museums and libraries which people enter and use at their own paces. Support for this proposal comes from those who believe that university admission standards serve to build status more than they contribute to education. According to this view, students will learn what and when they want. A non-selective, comprehensive university is desired by these people.

Another plan calls for universal entry to higher education on the basis of particular needs and talents. This proposal provides for some form of higher education, but not necessarily a four-year university program, for all, a scheme which requires a division of labor among institutions: two year, four year, upper division, graduate schools, new institutions, and new certifying agencies, too.

A third variation calls for the admission of a percentage of students under different selection criteria than the remainder who are selected by traditional criteria. This version usually includes special transitional summer or full year programs to enrich the preparation of those students admitted under the new criteria.

These plans all replace to some degree traditional meritocratic admissions standards with criteria designed to provide educational opportunity and

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to increase the college enrollment of minority groups and poor people. Implicit to these proposals is the questioning of the validity of standardized tests and secondary school grades as criteria for admission. These variations of the same theme emphasize that college degrees are necessary for jobs and upward mobility and that higher education is accessible to most middle-class Whites. But there are financial, academic, motivational, and, to some degree, geographic barriers tied to the minority status of others. To overcome these barriers special efforts to provide financial aid, academic enrichment, and success models are required.

Cornell University has chosen the third alternative in her attempt to use her strengths and resources to offer greater educational opportunities to students whose backgrounds and preparation have not permitted them to develop their full potential. Appendix "A," distributed as a separate piece, outlines the admissions competition, criteria employed, the enrollment of these students in the different colleges at Cornell, and discusses special admissions efforts, including the COSEP Program (Committee on Special Educational Projects). This Program has encouraged Cornell admissions officers to weigh selection criteria differently than in the past, to take into account the differences and disadvantages in preparation of many minority group members. It has been found that standardized test scores are not as predictive of academic success for this group of students as they are for others, but that recommendations about motivation are extremely important predictors of classroom performance. A limited number of COSEP-identified students, about ten to fifteen percent of the total enrolled in Arts and Sciences (seventeen in 1970), for example, are considered academic "gambles" and are required to attend Cornell-sponsored pre-freshman enrichment programs. Some other students are invited to attend the summer program if they think it will ease their transition from school to college.

It should be noted that one school's risk candidate is another one's average student. Cornell educators do not delude themselves into thinking that they have done anything extraordinary in the way of helping truly risk students. However, it has been true that students with markedly different preparation than their more typical classmates do not achieve at the same level. In this sense, every school can define its marginal student. The important criteria to distinguish are graduation rates and semester grade point averages.

While the typical Arts and Sciences student ranked in the top ten percent of his high school class and had College Board aptitude scores above 675, the typical COSEP-identified student achieved in the top fifth of his high school class and scored in the high 400's and low 500's on his SAT's. Those considered gambles generally scored in the 300 to low 400 range and achieved above the sixtieth percentile in a variety of secondary schools. Cornell's experience reflects the results and the statistics about aptitude scores reported in the U.S. Office of Education study, "Equality

of Educational Opportunity." Median aptitude scores vary by school systems, geographic areas, ethnic groups, and other demographic variables.

What constitutes remedial or enrichment work? Some professors believe that calculus is the first college-level mathematics course and that the first course in chemistry should require a knowledge of high school chemistry. In their schools, college algebra, trigonometry, and introductory chemistry would be considered remedial or enrichment courses. Cornell has offered several specially designed transition courses as well as other courses during the COSEP-sponsored summer program. But during the school year, students take regular courses. Some carry four three-hour courses instead of the typical five three-hour course load during the first year, but that is the only variation to date. Students who find it necessary to carry the lighter course load or who have difficulty adjusting to the academic demands of the College may extend their A.B. programs to five years. Currently, departments and students are discussing the need for and the possible nature of new introductory courses, particularly in mathematics and sciences, for the summer and first year programs.

A number of departments have offered "Black studies" and similar courses for several years. The English, economics, and sociology departments have been particularly responsive. In 1969, the Africana Studies and Research Center was created and offered about ten courses each term. It has expanded its curriculum and faculty for this year.

The Cornell faculties have been responsive to the advising and teaching of specially recruited minority group students. Each College has an office which serves as its primary center for academic advising; and the COSEP Program has a counseling center which emphasizes non-academic assistance. However, most problems are complex and the services of the offices often overlap. Last year, upperclass students were employed as advisers to provide a bridge or a link between freshmen and faculty members. This program seems to be succeeding, and it has expanded in size and to other colleges this year.

The COSEP-identified students--about 500 strong now, with 240 freshmen--are a diverse group including fraternity joiners, independent types, the politically active, and athletes; a wide range of personality types is represented.

A frequently asked question concerns the success of the Program. As we have tried to evaluate it, we have had to define what we mean by success. Do we mean "staying power," that is, the number who graduate; grades each semester; the distribution of students in particular fields; or do we mean some combination of these criteria? There have been three major studies of the specially recruited students at Cornell. In 1965, William Tetlow, then in the Office of Admissions, did a prediction study with a sample of thirty-seven minority group students; he used first semester GPA as

the criterion. Although the sample size limits the usefulness of the study, the results did not refute the hypothesis that standardized test scores do not predict as well for these students. In the spring of 1967, Miss Nancy Brereton, also of the Office of Admissions, did a more exhaustive examination with a sample of eighty-six COSEP-identified students. She, too, used the first semester grade point average as the criterion measure. In addition, over thirty other possible predictors (including school type and location, parents education and occupation, academic and non-academic honors, etc.) were examined. Miss Brereton came to the following tentative conclusions: (1) Objective aptitude test scores are helpful predictors of first semester academic performance of female minority students. (2) Objective aptitude test scores are not valid predictors of first semester academic performance for male minority group students. However, subjective indices of high school performance, for example, counselor ratings, are very good predictors. The best correlations accounted for about ten percent of the variances.

In 1969, Bill Tetlow, then Director of the Office of Institutional Research, did a more exhaustive study examining four standard predictors, SAT Verbal, SAT Math, secondary school rank expressed in tenths and secondary school rank converted to a standardized (20 to 80) scale. His sample included 234 students and he examined 700 semesters of performance. He found: (1) The standard academic predictors are less valid for COSEP-identified students than for others, but the predictors are not completely invalid. The best weighted multiple correlation he achieved was approximately 0.3 (a correlation, symbolized by r, of 0.3 means that the variables used account for about nine percent of the various factors which influence students' achievement. A correlation of 0.5 means that the variables account for twenty-five percent of the factors, etc.). (2) SAT Verbal scores correlate very poorly with grade point averages for COSEP-identified students. (3) SAT Math scores correlate approximately the same for all students, but they are relatively poor predictors (r approximately equals 0.3). (4) Rank in class when converted to a standardized scale is the best single predictor for COSEP-identified male students. However, it is not an effective predictor for COSEP-identified female students. (5) The best single predictor (r=0.6) of second semester performance is the first semester performance at Cornell.

Each of these studies justifies the practice of putting very limited value on the standard academic predictors when selecting COSEP-identified students. At the same time, they suggest, as does another study by Mr. Tetlow, that non-intellective factors such as motivation, leadership ability, talent, etc., are more useful predictors of college achievement.

These results seem to confirm the conclusions of Alexander Astin, Director of Research for the American Council of Education. Mr. Astin has chastised admissions officers for being too selective, for confining themselves to a narrow band of predictive criteria. The lessons learned at Cornell suggest that administrators should re-evaluate the criteria used in admissions decisions and should look for additional predictors of academic success.

CORNELL UNIVERSITY, ITHACA, NEW YORK Appendix A

A. Institutional Data

	TOTAL	FRESHMEN
--about 10,000 undergraduates in seven schools and colleges		
--N.Y. State College of Agriculture	2200	500
--College of Architecture, Art, and Planning	240	65
--Department of Fine Arts	85	25
--College of Arts and Sciences	3250	875*
--College of Engineering	2050	630
--School of Hotel Administration	500	100
--N.Y. State College of Human Ecology	950	250
--N.Y. State School of Industrial and Labor Relations	430	115

*Total does not reflect the new class size. Until 1970, class was 750.

B. Admissions competition and criteria.

--Although the number and academic quality of applicants varies, each unit is quite competitive in its own context: Professional programs emphasize knowledge of and motivation for the career field; all units emphasize academic preparation. Secondary school achievement, aptitude scores, school recommendations, and extracurricular use of time and talents are the primary criteria used. Several units require interviews. The competition is determined by the candidates more than by college requirements.

C. Special Admissions Efforts

--The N.Y. State College of Agriculture offers a one-year program for sixty students which may be terminal but has been used as a testing ground by a number of previously marginal students.

--COSEP--The Committee on Special Educational Projects

In 1963 Cornell established a faculty committee (COSEP) which recommended the establishment of a special scholarship fund for "culturally disadvantaged students whose credentials will appear marginal or worse by the usual Cornell admissions standards, but who otherwise give evidence of being able to compete at Cornell." The program has shown that there are minority group students "who, despite the handicap of relatively inferior elementary and secondary education, are quite capable of doing satisfactory work" at a demanding university. The COSEP Program encourages and assists recruitment, admission, financial assistance, and counseling of minority group students.

--Admissions and COSEP

While each undergraduate unit evaluates the abilities of applicants according to the goals of the school, all units have found that traditional criteria, particularly SAT's are not as predictive of academic success for minority students as for white students. Typically, SAT's average 150-200 points lower than the class as a whole in Arts and Sciences, where most COSEP-identified students matriculate. The difference is less in the other units.

--Enrollment

The number of entering COSEP-identified students has increased from 37 in 1965, 49 in 1966, 69 in 1967, 94 in 1968, 112 in 1969, to 242 in 1970. The freshman class usually numbers about 2500.

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